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Postscripts

By JACK POST

Quartering troops on a town of English citizens was outrageous, and town meetings at Duxbury, Plymouth, Kingston, Hanson and Scituate said so in no uncertain terms in a letter presented to British General Gage at Boston in February 1775. He had stationed 100 of the Queen's Guards at Marshfield, under the command of Captain Balfour, this in times of peace, simply because the Tory citizens of the town had asked for protection against their Whig op-

ponents! A fortnight later, the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts firmly supported the 6 protesting towns, recommending "perseverance and a watchful eye on the behavior of those who are aiming at the destruction of our liberties."

General Gage thought fit to continue his protection of the loyal citizens at Marshfield, and Captain Balfour and his 100 men were joyfully made welcome by the Tories for the protection from "the licentious spirit that has been prevalent," and were "happily relieved in the arrival of the detachment of His Majesty's troops to assist in preserving the peace, and in checking the insupportable insolence of the disaffected and the turbulent." The King's men were comfortably accommodated, their discipline remained exemplary, and the Marshfield Tories once more dared to drink their tea and voice their thoughts as they pleased; while the young ladies of the town vied in entertaining the dashing Captain Balfour and his aides.

Like any capable officer, Captain Balfour sought to keep his men occupied; so he arranged expeditions into the surrounding countryside on whatever provocation could be justified at the moment. Of course it was his duty to make sure that no illegal supplies of powder and shot were collected in the neighborhood. That might prove disastrous, with so many of the inhabitants expressing their feelings so vehemently about taxation and injustice. Only a little over a year ago, a supply of tea packed away in the cellar of Nehemiah Thomas and some in the Bourne store had been seized, loaded onto an oxcart, and hauled to Tea Rock Hill. There at night, on a stone "quite flat on top," a torch was applied to the tea until it was entirely consumed. Not even the Indians had done better to the tea they had consigned to Boston Harbor!

After the turn of 1774, the loyalists had convened a meeting which instructed Abijah White, the Marshfield representative to the General Court, to use his utmost endeavors that the offenders in both tea parties be properly punished, and that all such disloyal conduct be censured. Abijah White dutifully presented the Marshfield resolves to the General Court, and was promptly lampooned in the next issue of the Boston Gazette:

"Abijah White when sent
Our Marshfield friends to represent
Himself with dread array involves
Commissions, pistols, swords, resolves,
In awful pomp descending down
Bore terror on the factious town..."

In October 1774, the patriots of the town in their turn voted to send Nehemiah Thomas as their representative to the proposed Provincial Congress at Concord; but when Captain Balfour and his troops



Jack Post autographs a copy of his book, "A history of the Duxbury Rural & Historical Society."

arrived, the loyalists again seized their opportunity, called yet another town meeting, and voted "not to be bound by any resolves of the Provincial Congress, or any illegal assemblages whatever."

Duxbury lay a convenient half day's march from the British encampment; so one Sunday Captain Balfour ordered his men toward that town along the Green Harbor Path, which led directly toward the Meetinghouse. Suddenly, the Duxbury people at worship beheld Redcoats peering in the windows, and many hearts jumped, for not a few of the Duxbury churchgoers were militiamen, and this could be a trap! But the troops withdrew without incident, leaving the frightened citizens more than ever aroused by this flagrant breach of the sanctity of the Sabbath.

Captain Balfour next considered an expedition against a reported powder cache in Plymouth, but first, testing the mood of the towns, he asked John Watson of Plymouth at a Loyalist meeting at Edward Winslow's house, "Will they fight?" and the instant answer, "Yes, like the devils!" caused the captain to abandon the idea.

Then early on the morning of April 20, 1775, a horseman galloped down the Bay Path from Boston, spreading news of the heroic resistance of the patriots at Concord and Lexington, narrating the blood-stained retreat of the British to their garrison at Boston. Before nightfall, the Old Colony militiamen were assembling. One hundred British soldiers were quartered in Marshfield. They too must be dealt with!

By 7 o'clock of the morning of the 21st, the Plymouth Company under Captain Mayhew was on the march, soon to join the Kingston men under Captain Peleg Wadsworth, then Duxbury under Captain George Partridge. By noon nearly 500 men were gathered above the Nathaniel Ray Thomas farm where the redcoats were quartered. A council of war was called by Colonel Cotton and Colonel Briggs Alden, with all of the captains attending. Should they wait for the other companies to arrive from the surrounding towns, or should they attack? After all, although the patriots numbered 5 to one, soon their force would be overwhelming. In the afternoon Captain Clapp and his men would arrive from Rochester, then Captain Harlow and the Plympton company. Captain Peleg Wadsworth, disgusted at the delay, moved his men forward toward the British camp; but when no one joined his small force, decided not to risk the attack alone.

Captain Balfour meanwhile, watching the army opposite him grow by the hour, silently prepared his men for evacuation, and when dusk fell, marched them quietly down to the Cut River, where in the inlet he embarked them in longboats waiting to row them to 2 sloops of war riding at anchor off Brant Rock. On the way, the regulars seized 2 Duxbury men, scouting for the patriot militia. One broke loose and fired his gun, spreading the alarm to the colonist camp; the other the British abandoned at the waterfront. But the alarm came too late. Captain Balfour and his men had escaped, and with them a victory at Marshfield. Later the gallant Captain told a Duxbury man he encountered during the campaigning around New York that if the patriots had attacked at Marshfield, he would most certainly have surrendered in the face of such impossible odds.